



# News Release

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## **West Nile virus infections confirmed in two Washington residents**

*First human cases in state since 2010; one from each side of the state*

**OLYMPIA** — Two Washington residents confirmed with West Nile virus infection are the first human cases in the state in two years. A Pierce County woman in her 70s was likely exposed to the virus while traveling out of state; a Yakima man in his 30s hadn't left the state. Test results were confirmed at the Washington State Public Health Laboratories in Shoreline this week.

“West Nile virus is [hitting many parts of the nation](#) hard this season, so it's not surprising we'd have cases among people in our state,” said Secretary of Health Mary Selecky. “The best protection against this disease is avoiding mosquito bites. The travel-related case is a reminder to protect yourself when you travel, too.”

Following a few precautions can help people avoid mosquito bites: stay indoors around dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active; and use a mosquito repellent when mosquitoes are active. People who spend a lot of time doing things outdoors like farming, hiking, at sports events, or fishing and hunting should be careful to avoid insect bites. Always follow label instructions when using mosquito repellents.

It's also important to reduce mosquito habitat around the home. Turning over old buckets or cans; emptying water from old tires; and frequently changing water in birdbaths, pet dishes, and water troughs helps eliminate the small puddles of water in which many mosquito larvae grow.

Several mosquito samples have also tested positive for West Nile virus in 2012, all of them in south central Washington. A horse in eastern Washington was diagnosed with the infection in August and was euthanized. West Nile virus is primarily a bird disease, and often dead birds are an early sign that the disease is active in an area. People may [report dead birds](#) online. No dead birds have been reported with the infection so far this year in the state.

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[West Nile virus](#) infection can cause encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) or meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the spinal cord and brain). People over age 50 have the highest risk for serious illness.

Symptoms may include fever, headache, body aches, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, paralysis, and coma. People with severe symptoms should contact a health care provider.

In 2009, there were 38 human cases of West Nile virus infection among Washington residents, including the only death from the disease in our state. In 2010, there were two human cases in the state, along with detections in two dead birds and 126 mosquito samples. Five mosquito samples tested positive in 2011 but there were no human or horse cases or dead bird detections.

The West Nile virus information line, 866-78-VIRUS, and an [online West Nile virus chart](#) are updated as conditions and detections change.

The [Department of Health website](#) (doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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